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ABSTRACT

ConnectED 2000, a gathering of representatives of an array of precollege outreach programs, was the beginning of a national dialogue about such outreach programs. To continue and increase this dialogue it is necessary to find out more about precollege outreach programs. A step in this direction was taken through a national survey developed by The College Board in association with the Education Resources Institute and the National TRIO Clearinghouse. Between summer 1999 and spring 2000, more than 1,100 programs representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories responded to the National Survey of Outreach Programs, with a specific focus on Upward Bound and Talent Search programs. TRIO programs represented one third of responding programs, and GEAR UP, the other major federal initiative, accounted for 9%. Information from these programs shows that TRIO programs are the most notable of outreach efforts, but that all current efforts fall far short of what is needed. Estimates suggest that serving the entire eligible population would require an annual expenditure beyond the $6 billion mark. To bring about this kind of support, it will be necessary to engage the nation, to make the entire country aware of the needs, urgency, and purpose of precollege outreach. (SLD)

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Engaging a Nation: Expanding the Role of TRIO and other Outreach Programs

In January 2000, over 500 individuals from across the United States assembled in San Diego for ConnectED 2000, a national summit on college opportunity for our nation's neediest students. Many organizations that participated in ConnectED 2000 are now involved in the Pathways to College Network initiative, a coalition of philanthropic and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This article describes the landscape of pre-college and other outreach programs, including TRIO programs, using data compiled by the College Board, the Education Resources Institute, and the National TRIO Clearinghouse in 1999, and discusses their current and future role as well as areas for focus and improvement.

by Watson Scott Swail, Ed.D.

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Engaging a Nation:

Expanding the Role of TRIO and Other Outreach Programs

WATSON SCOTT SWAIL

In January 2000, over 500 individuals from across the United States assembled in San Diego for ConnectED 2000, a national summit on college opportunity for our nation's neediest students. The constituents were representative of a vast array of pre-college outreach programs, including TRIO Talent Search and Upward Bound, but also from other programs, such as MESA, AVID, College Summit, and I Know I Can. In total, over 200 programs were represented at ConnectED 2000.

Large-scale conferences and gatherings are not unique for practitioners and educators as a whole, but these are usually gatherings in a homogenous program group—all TRIO staff, for example. What made ConnectED 2000 different and special was the attendance of participants from different programs. Rarely does an opportunity present itself for people from various programs to come together and talk about issues important to the field of pre-college outreach. That's what happened in San Diego.

Further, and perhaps more impressive, was the inclusion of policymakers, K-12 educators, and philanthropists: the people who either make the rules or provide the money that support these programs. This was another unique feature of ConnectED 2000: creating an opportunity where program personnel could talk about the issues and challenges they face, but also allow for perspectives from funders and politicians.

Information is a most powerful equalizer in today's world. Our ability to expand the dialogue and understanding among programs is a critical step in advancing educational opportunity for students with great potential but few options. To advance our cause, we need to know who the other players are, tap the expertise of other practitioners, and operate with the suggestion that no program is an island. TRIO, GEAR UP, I Have a Dream, and other pre-college outreach programs share a common vision to increase college opportunities for low income and underrepresented students.

It is important to note that ConnectED 2000 was the beginning of a process: the start of a national dialogue. In the words of Bob Shireman, Director of Higher Education Programs at the James Irvine Foundation, we were there to 'engage a nation' to better help needy students from all areas of the country. This involves expanding outreach beyond students to include and welcome all citizens, businesses, and community groups. Only through a holistic approach that is both inclusive and diverse can we effectively raise the bar for all students, while simultaneously prying the doors of opportunity wider than they have ever been opened before. In brief, this country needs to become personally involved in the education and well being of our youth, and it is our ultimate challenge to make that happen.

The ideal behind 'engaging a nation' provided us with direction; a direction that requires us to reach beyond our current state of being to a different level of partnership and community.

The first step in making that happen is to learn more about who we are: the outreach programs and the participants who give so much to youth in America. With that knowledge, we can begin to build bridges and form partnerships with those around us to better meet the goals that we all share.

Describing the Landscape: A National Survey

In 1998, The College Board, in association with The Education Resources Institute and the National TRIO Clearinghouse, collaborated to develop and administer a national survey of pre-college outreach programs. Our purpose was to collect information about pre-college outreach programs across the United States to facilitate—among other things—the dissemination of information among programs. We likened the process to that of painting a landscape of outreach in America: a canvas to help illuminate the network of programs in operation across the country so that we may learn from the practice and insight of our peers. As described above, this was a major step in engaging a nation for college opportunity.

As most survey respondents will attest, the survey was extensive: we asked about contact information, program descriptions, goals and services, operational issues, staffing and training, student characteristics, operating budgets, and program needs and outcomes. The seven-page survey was the most extensive survey of outreach programs ever conducted.

Another wrinkle in the survey was that it was web-based. Using software developed by the Educational Testing Service, the survey was provided online to allow for a more direct and accurate collection of data. Of course, because the

survey was attempting to identify and collect information from programs across the country—many of whom were not on our mailing lists—we had to be creative in 'finding' these programs. Therefore, we utilized email with hyperlinks to reach our targeted audience, with the hope that program directors from TRIO and other programs on our email distribution list would forward our call for participation to others in the outreach network that had not been located. As well, we sent out over 4,500 letters to CEOs and Presidents of two- and four-year colleges across the nation and set up booths at a number of national conferences. For those without the electronic wherewithal to complete the survey, paper formats were made available through the mail.

Between summer 1999 and Spring 2000, over 1,100 programs, representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Micronesia responded to the survey. Programs were restricted to those serving low-income and traditionally-underrepresented students at the pre-college level, with a minimum of 12 student participants per calendar year.

While the survey was our main data collection mechanism, we also took advantage of our vast networks to speak with program directors in a series of focus groups across the country. We used large professional gatherings, such as The College Board's National Forum in San Diego, the Council for Opportunity in Education's Annual Conference in San Antonio, and the Education All of One Nation Conference in Albuquerque to pull people together. In addition, we also coordinated special forums in Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC. The purpose of these sessions was to learn more about the type of programs that would end up participating in the survey, and also to speak frankly with program directors about the challenges they face in operating an outreach program.

The following discussion provides snapshots of the major findings from the National Survey of Outreach Programs, with specific analysis of Upward Bound and Talent Search programs.[1]

Distribution of Respondents TRIO programs represented one-third of all survey respondents, and the other major federal initiative, GEAR UP, accounted for nine percent. (Figure 1) One-fifth of the programs were sponsored by businesses, private organizations, or individuals. Upward Bound programs represented 63 percent of the TRIO respondents, while Talent Search represented 28 percent.

Length of Operation On average, programs in the survey had been in operation for 11 years. The average age for the TRIO programs was predictably longer (16 years), since those programs have had the longest legislative life of any outreach effort.

Location of Programs More than half of the programs (57 percent) were based at a college or university, 37 percent (or 16 percent of the total) at local schools, and 30 percent (or 13 percent of the total) community-based (Figure 2). Not surprisingly, most TRIO programs (80 percent) generally operate out of a post-secondary institution, while GEAR UP programs tend to operate from schools (39 percent). The majority of other federally and non-federally funded programs were based on college campuses.

Location of Services Nearly one-half (46 percent) of all programs listed their primary location of services at a college campus (Figure 3). GEAR UP programs, however, are typically delivered at a local education agency (80 percent), compared to 34 percent of TRIO programs. Within TRIO programs, three quarters of Upward Bound were

Figure 1. Distribution of Outreach Programs by Program Type

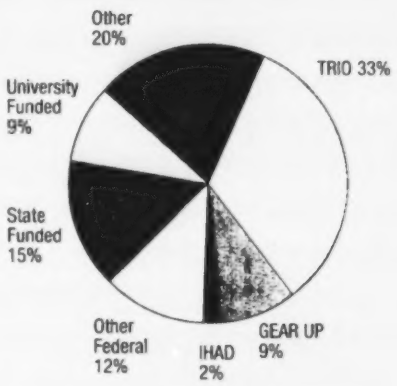


Figure 2. Distribution of Outreach Programs by Sponsoring Institution Type

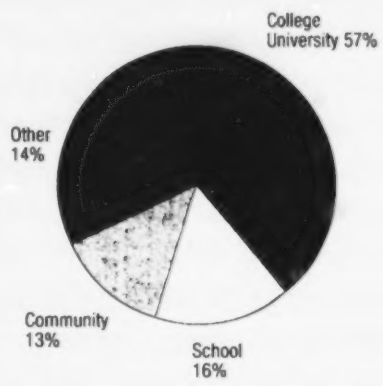


Figure 3. Distribution of Outreach Programs by Location of Services

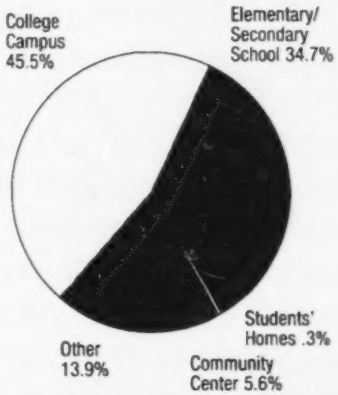
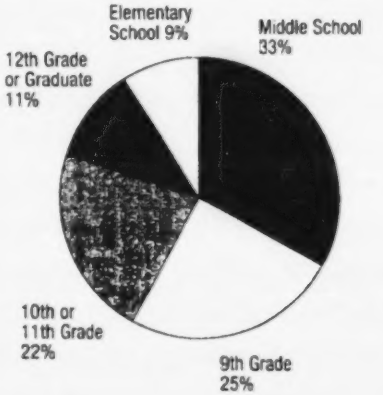


Figure 4. Average Starting Point for Outreach Programs



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college-based, while the same ratio of Talent Search programs were based at LEAs.

Students Served About one-half of all programs served students of a particular school or school district, and one-fourth target a particular community. The majority of TRIO and GEAR UP programs target services toward students attending a particular school or school district.

Periods of Services About two-thirds (67 percent) of all outreach programs offered services throughout the year. Four out of five TRIO and GEAR UP programs reported operating year round, compared with only one-in-three university-funded programs. Virtually all Upward Bound programs operate throughout the year, compared to 68 percent of Talent Search programs.

Hours of Service Fifty-three percent of all programs offered services to students during school hours and after school; 60 percent of all programs offer services on the weekends. Almost all (94 percent) Talent Search services were offered during the school day, compared to half (54 percent) of Upward Bound programs, and four of five Upward Bound and Talent Search programs operate after school. Upward Bound programs were more likely to operate on weekends (87 percent) than Talent Search programs (49 percent).

Student Targeting Ninety-plus percent of all outreach programs were targeted at students in middle school or beyond, and over 50 percent ninth grade or higher (Figure 5). By definition, early intervention programs generally focus on helping "educationally or economically disadvantaged students" aspire to and prepare for higher education. Survey data show that the three most targeted student populations included low-income, minority, and first-generation students, representing high areas of most concern for policymakers and educators. Programs also targeted various levels of the education pipeline (middle and high school), students of various academic abilities (high and low), and other segments of society (e.g., women).

Program Goals Ninety percent of programs responding to this survey focused on college attendance and awareness as their primary goals (Figure 6). These goals appear to be relatively more common for TRIO and GEAR UP programs, likely because both programs were explicitly created to focus on college access. Building student self-esteem and providing role models were also common goals, reported by 84 and 81 percent of all programs, respectively.

Strategies and Activities In terms of activities and strategies, most of the programs surveyed focus on college and career awareness, social development, and academic support (Figure 7). The highest-ranked service was college awareness, and a perusal of the list finds a number of related activities, including

Figure 5. Student Groups Targeted by Outreach Programs

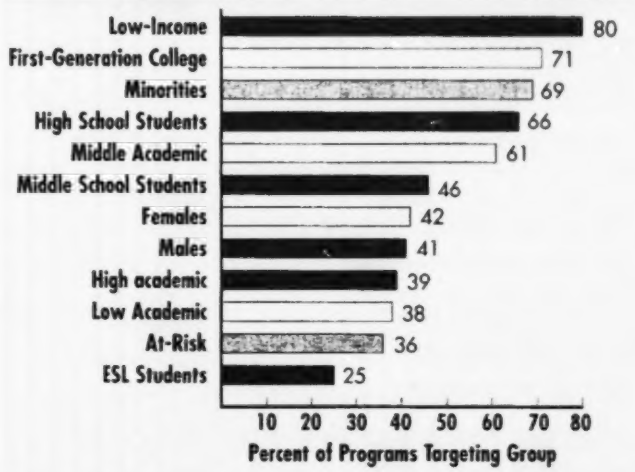


Figure 6. Goals of Outreach Programs

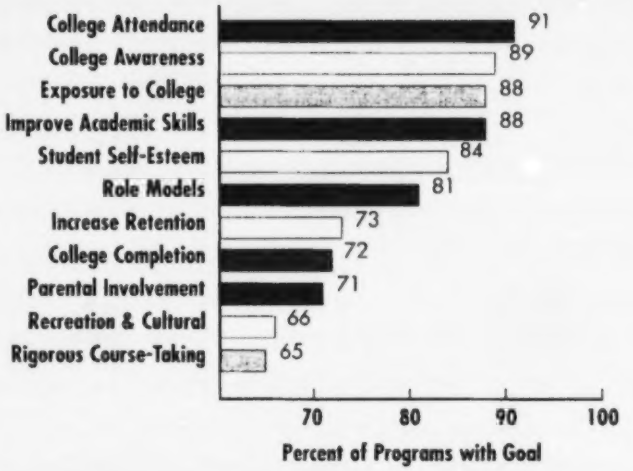
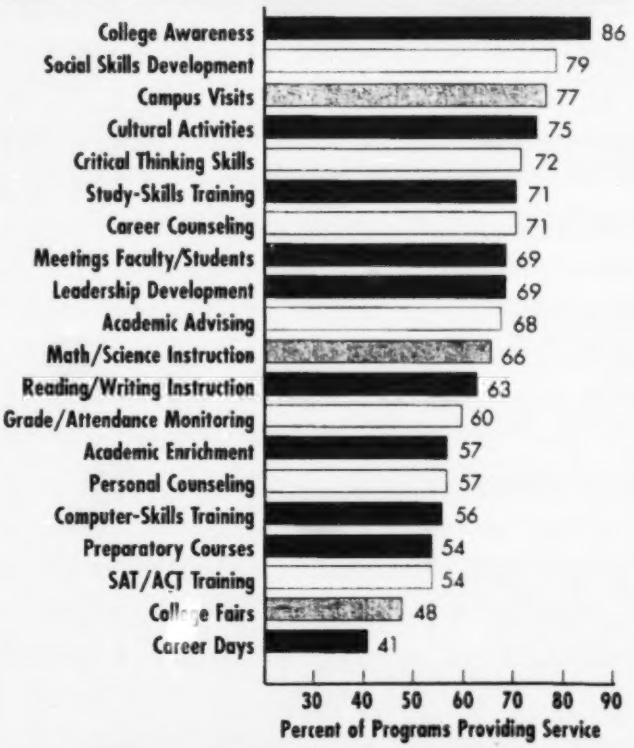


Figure 7. Services Offered by Outreach Programs



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campus visits, meetings with faculty and students, and college fairs. Academic support activities focused on a number of areas, from content knowledge (math, science, reading, writing) to skill development (study, test-taking, computer, critical thinking).

Instructional Approaches About three-fourths of all programs utilized workshops (79 percent) and classroom instruction (75 percent). Role modeling, tutoring, and mentoring were also frequently used by all types of programs. More than one-half of all programs also use assessment and testing practice (60 percent) or peer group learning groups (56 percent).

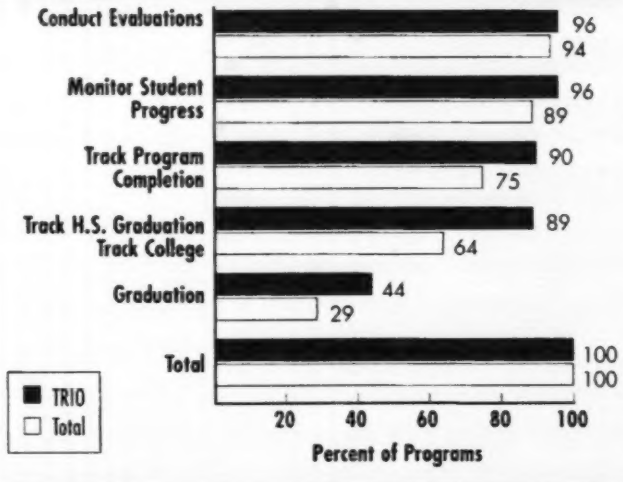
Financial Support Half (49 percent) of the responding programs received financial support from the federal government, one-quarter received financial support from state governments, and one-quarter received financial support from colleges and universities.

Parental Involvement A common theme among programs, parental involvement, emerged during focus group discussions of TRIO and other program directors. More than two-thirds (69 percent) of all outreach programs surveyed offered a parental component, while about one-fifth (22 percent) of all programs mandated parental involvement. Directors pointed out the difficulty in getting parents involved in their child's education, and getting them to stay involved. Directors were quick to note that it was not always the parent's fault: single parents and relatives acting as guardians often have much heavier burdens to lift than more typical two-parent families. This is a huge challenge in most outreach programs.

Staffing Ninety percent of programs surveyed had at least one paid staff member, and the majority of programs employed both full-time and part-time staff. Over half (57 percent) employed college students, but only 10 percent employed high school students. Nearly one-half (43 percent) of all responding programs relied partially on volunteers.

Staff Training Three-of-four outreach programs required pre-service training for staff members, averaging 17 hours in duration. TRIO programs were much more likely to offer training than other programs (87 percent), and averaged 20 hours of training.

Figure 8. Percentage of Programs (TRIO vs All) Participating in Evaluation and Monitoring Activities



Program Evaluation Programs were asked a variety of questions about self-evaluation efforts. In each case, a higher percentage of TRIO programs conducted evaluation projects than other programs (see Figure 8). In total, almost all (94 percent) responding programs reported that they conducted program evaluations (96 percent of TRIO programs responded positively). Three-fourths of all programs reported that they track program completion and 64 percent reported that they track high school graduation. Only 29 percent of all programs reported tracking graduation from college.

What We Learned

The information from the National Survey of Outreach Programs helps us understand the web of programs in existence. While we have by no means exhausted the universe of outreach programs, the survey gives us a better idea of where many programs operate, what they do, and what students they serve. It helps describe the landscape.

Today's political environment focuses on school reform to improve conditions for all children. President Bush placed education ahead of most other agenda items by sending his education plan to Congress before any other legislative package. Regardless of one's political views, the President's action is a clear reflection of the wishes of the American people: education matters.

But what role do outreach programs play in the reform process, and where do we go from here? In other articles, David Roth, of Occidental College, and I have argued that, no matter how well intentioned, school reform will not adequately provide the resources that low-income, underrepresented, high-need students require (Swail & Roth, 2001). Our socio-political system does not allow for a completely fair or equitable system, not in terms of teacher development and preparation, nor in terms of school infrastructure and material support. Simply put, our youth requiring the most attention and resources almost always receive the least.

Programs focused on providing additional or supplementary support services to needy students, like TRIO, help plug up the holes in our system where students fall out. As the survey found, these programs—sometimes emanating from colleges and universities, sometimes from the community, and occasionally from within the school system itself—provide a wide array of services for needy students aimed at making college possible. We argue that these outreach programs are already a part of all schools to some degree. The difference is that some schools provide adequate college preparatory opportunities within the traditional parameters of the school day, while students attending other, less fortunate schools, are left on their own. The reality is that separate and distinct early intervention and college outreach efforts for some students is often considered normal or average scholastic practice for other, more advantaged students.

Clearly, the federal TRIO programs are the most notable of all outreach efforts. Borne of the War on Poverty campaign of the 60s, Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services were established to help provide supplementary acade-

mic support to low-income, historically underrepresented students. Later reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act of 1965 broadened the programs, such that TRIO programs now serve over 750,000 students each year from middle school to pre-graduate level. The congressionally mandated GEAR UP program (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), while similar to TRIO programs in several respects, also serves thousands of students across the nation.

Between these two federal programs alone, well over one million students are served each year. But given the size and scope of the problems cited above, this is hardly enough. We educate over 50 million public school students in America each year. Approximately 3 out of 4 students will go on to some form of postsecondary education after completing high school. Knowing that many of those students will not earn a degree, it is safe to say that more than 13 million of our current cohort of public school students will not matriculate to postsecondary education. Only one quarter of high school graduates will earn a bachelor's degree: a level important for social and economic success in this burgeoning global economy. And while some may argue that postsecondary education is not well suited for some of these students, most would benefit from the experience, skills, and perspectives that higher education has to offer. Instead, these students face a reality of trying to earn a decent living wage in today's high-skills, increasingly competitive, global economy.

We desperately need school reform, but let's be clear: we desperately need supplemental outreach programs. None of the programs identified in the National Survey of Outreach Programs are broad enough to provide services to all needy students. For instance, the Council for Opportunity in Education estimates that TRIO programs are able to serve less than 10 percent of the eligible student population in America under current budget provisions. Based on current congressional funding, serving the entire eligible population would require an annual expenditure well beyond the $6 billion mark.

Engaging A Nation

So we come back to "engaging a nation." A number of factors are aligned to pave the way to a better education for all students. First, the political climate is ripe. Education budgets at the federal, state, and local levels will likely expand in the upcoming years, even in light of the recent economic slowdown or the September 11th tragedy. Politicians will be wary of reducing educational capital in light of public support in that area. Second, we know more about teaching and learning than ever before. Although we may not always agree on the best strategies to promote education, our knowledge base has grown significantly and our menu of strategies is promising. And third, America may be ready for the challenge. Perhaps it is naïve, but my sense is that the American public has come to understand the complexity of education and the importance of providing adequate resources for all students. Certainly, some recent actions, such as shifting of state funding formulae and the regression of affirmative action, may send an alternative message about our priorities, but there is no doubt that education has come forward as a politically important issue.

In terms of our outreach programs, what is it that we need to do? How do we work to improve and expand programs to serve an increasing number of needy students throughout the United States?

Communicate. If Upward Bound, Talent Search, GEAR UP, or other programs fail to let the world know how much good they are doing, how can one expect to receive additional funding or expand services for our most needy students? One of the most important aspects of running a successful program is to let the community know what is going on. Running a public relations campaign is taxing, but the rewards are unparalleled. When people understand what your program does—how it impacts students and the community—support will follow. Certainly we need to do this at the federal level by exposing the impact of our programs to members of congress. But we also know that all politics are local, so individual programs must reach out to their local representatives and let them know what a difference TRIO and other programs make in their community.

Evaluate. Politicians and funders need evidence of success. Student perspectives and stories are important to humanize a program, but empirical evidence trumps almost any message. Programs and systems need to provide a better accounting of where the money goes, how it is used, and what impact it has. According to our survey, almost 19 of 20 programs stated that they evaluate their program operations. From my experience viewing many programs and their evaluation frameworks, most do an inadequate job of it. Directors and other staff who plan and conduct evaluations usually aren't trained in that area, do not have adequate funding to provide an acceptable level of evaluation, nor do they have experience analyzing the data. We need to provide more sophisticated training to program personnel so they can collect better data that will, in turn, help improve their program services, document their progress toward pre-determined goals, and educate the public about how their program impacts the community and its students.

Improve Practice. Most people look at evaluation as a pain. Well, it often is. But evaluation is also a key to program improvement. One must look at the process of program operation as a continuous improvement model, where one cannot be satisfied purely by today's successes. Rather, it is important to improve upon both the successes and the failures to ensure that students get the most impact out of program services. Through our survey and subsequent discussions with program directors, we learned that they needed more help with evaluation, parental involvement, staffing and staff training, and technology, for instance. We can do a better job of relaying best practices in each of these areas to directors and staff. But a significant resource is the network of our peers and colleagues.

Network. No program is an island, even though sometimes program staff may feel isolated. TRIO programs are luckier than most. There is a shared—almost tacit—understanding that a network exists. The bonds formed through regional and national exercises help support the understanding that help is only an email or workshop away. And for every problem that one may encounter, someone out in the network has probably had to struggle with that same experience before.

But a network is only useful when used, and it is only fruitful when nur-

tured. Just like good friends, the true worth of a relationship is evidenced only when tested. For TRIO programs, more must be made of these relationships.

Networking must also go beyond the traditional TRIO community. TRIO programs are also not an island, and therefore should not isolate themselves from the world of outreach programs. For non-TRIO programs, including GEAR UP and non-federal programs, there is a need to reach out and share experiences. Program directors must learn to know who else is working in the field. ConnectED 2000 provided a launching pad for this type of networking, and hopefully the creation of the Pathways to College Network, supported by the U.S. Department of Education and a number of philanthropic organizations, will provide some permanence and structure. If not, it is likely that we will quickly regress to where we were before. Only the shared commitment of educators, practitioners, and funders will allow a continued network to develop.

Collaborate A second step of networking is collaboration. Networking allows people to learn more about each other and share information and strategies. Collaboration occurs when programs take the next step by working together toward new, shared goals. Trying to achieve a new level by complementing each other's attributes. Upward Bound programs, for instance, can increase their collaboration among other Upward Bound programs, or they can begin to collaborate with other, non-TRIO programs. In a new joint initiative between the GE Fund and the Council for Opportunity in Education, we are combining resources to see if the GE College Bound program, which has only been operated in cities where a GE plant is in operation, can be replicated in other, non-GE cities through TRIO programs. So there are no rules, just possibilities. We just need to think about the opportunities and turn them into realities.

Enter the 21st Century The U.S. workforce is running as an efficient system right now. Unemployment is as low as it has been in decades, and the market is still flush with production, even in light of recent slowdowns. But the opportunities for our youth are not the same as those available 20 or 30 years ago. Today's economy demands higher-level skills from its workforce. Thus, outreach programs need to help students develop these skills to be competitive. The traditional skills of mathematics, science, and reading are more important than ever, but so are other, softer skills that have become essential tools in today's workforce, such as the ability to work effectively within a team or to initiative and guide a project. While computers are an important reality of working in society, the move from the industrialized age to Toffler's Third Wave—the information age—focuses on the transfer of knowledge and the power of holding it. Students coming out of our programs need to possess much more than the computer skills required to enter business and industry; they need to be able to work well with their colleagues and work toward shared goals and objectives. Higher-order communication skills are a necessity for survival.

Concluding Thoughts

Over the course of the past 30 years, the number of students attending college has increased dramatically. Today, over 14 million students attend some type of postsecondary education institution (NCES, 2001). During that time, TRIO programs and the outreach community have provided important support and skill development to help low-income students prepare, access, and complete college.

How we serve students in the future and ensure that outreach programs are better poised to help our public schools depends largely on the commitment of stakeholders. We must learn more about ourselves through evaluation and self-assessment, communicate with the public about what we do, and network with others who share similar goals.

As we said at ConnectED 2000 in San Diego, we need to *engage a child*, so that he or she knows that there is a place for them in our society. We need to *engage a community* to create a shared sense of purpose and spread the responsibility for every child. And ultimately, we need to *engage a nation*: to make the entire country aware of the needs, the urgency, and the purpose of what we are doing. This is our responsibility.

Resources

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Notes

1 For a more complete discussion of the data, see "A View of the Landscape: Results of the National Survey of Outreach Programs," in *2001 Outreach Program Handbook*, published by the College Board and available from www.collegeboard.com.

Dr. Swail would like to thank previous collaborators David Roth and Laura Perna for their vision and inspiration.

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